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ABSTRACT

Current approaches to teaching culture which have adapted the anthropological model to contemporary life situations can serve as a guide to the organization of traditional civilization course material, from which exercises can be developed. Culture instruction should incorporate a cross-cultural dimension, be authentically contemporary, and be truly comprehensive. These concerns can be adapted for instruction in cultural history, either by using techniques as they are currently used, or by developing relatively new activities. Possible activities include role playing, simulations and reenactments, dialogues among the dead, assimilators (finding culturally appropriate resolutions for a situation in the target culture), and use of films or works of art. Activities and materials that can be used to show how images of the past function in contemporary culture include advertisements, folksongs, and history textbooks. It is important to maintain a balance between current and past culture, sacrificing neither to the other. The examples are taken from French history and civilization classes. (MSE)

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Contemporary Culture: A Model for Teaching a Culture's Heritage

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Our success in the past twenty-five years in establishing a rationale and a pedagogy for teaching contemporary culture has left us uneasy about the role of the culture's heritage, or what we sometimes call "civilization," in our classes. We have adapted the anthropological model of culture as the shared and learned patterns of behavior that shape a society's life and applied it to everyday existence in a contemporary setting.[1] This view of culture dominates in the first levels of language teaching. Increasingly sophisticated courses in current culture have been added to the advanced curriculum. They supplement, or even replace, the more traditional civilization course which might be described as presenting a chronological panorama with a special focus on the political and social context of artistic and literary monuments.[2]

So exclusive is the attention given to contemporary culture in our professional literature that one might suspect that it has completely displaced the more traditional approach in our classrooms. However, this is not the case. When they have been maintained, advanced culture courses with a historical component continue to attract students.[3] Even if beginning textbooks seldom give much attention to a target culture's heritage, intermediate texts often contain segments devoted to aspects of the culture which are not strictly contemporary. It is a mistake to believe that students are drawn exclusively to today's version of life in the foreign culture. Many of them have a curiosity about the culture's patrimony, and satisfying this interest can often be just as powerful a motivating force as the study of current patterns of life. If we ignore the forces from the past

which have shaped the identity of a people's contemporary culture, we are only presenting a superficial view. The cultures we deal with in our language classes have a much longer tradition than our own, and consciousness of this heritage is a larger part of present target cultures than in the United States. We are likely to impose on the target culture the ahistorical attitude of our own world view.

Now that we have reached a consensus about contemporary culture, our efforts must be turned to elaborating the theory and pedagogy of teaching the culture's heritage. This will give new vigor to the teaching of history-based culture as well as enrich our understanding of contemporary culture. Our consensus about contemporary culture can also provide a model for our approach to its past culture. Familiar strategies for teaching current culture can inspire a more active methodology than the lecture/textbook format that characterized civilization classes for so long. The first part of this chapter will show how our approach to contemporary culture can guide us in organizing the material that once appeared in traditional civilization courses. The second part will point to some classroom activities inspired by those used to teach current culture.

Formulating a Theory: From the Present to the Past

Three concerns commonly shape our approach to teaching current patterns of life in the second culture: our presentation should incorporate a cross-cultural dimension, should be authentically contemporary, and finally should be truly comprehensive.

The Cross-cultural Connection

The cross-cultural approach is designed to improve students' understanding of both the target culture and their own. It assumes that while we learn to function entirely within our culture as a member of it, attaining an informed understanding is difficult without stepping outside. A point of comparison calls into question unexamined assumptions members of a culture may carry. Coming to the second culture as an outsider gives the language student a perspective its own members may not have. Many authorities suggest that the contrast between just the mother culture and

the second may not be sufficient, and that it is useful to bring a third into play. This is true especially when the first two are related, as is the case when Americans study European or some Latin American cultures.[4] Reciprocally, the understanding of patterns in the target culture can break down the American students' ethnocentricity, giving them new insight into their own culture. Cross-cultural communication requires a consciousness of our own presuppositions as well as empathy for the second culture.

The same cross-cultural reciprocity should guide our study of the target culture's heritage. We should consider that at any given moment in the history of a people, they possessed a culture in the full anthropological sense we use when discussing contemporary culture. When dealing with the past we must analyze the whole range of shared and learned patterns of social life we examine when discussing today's culture. For convenience we may treat large blocks of the past as a monolithic culture—the Second Empire, or the Renaissance perhaps—even though we realize that within the continuity of cultural change, a people's culture is never exactly the same at two different moments.

Thus the first element of cross-cultural study will be the relationship between contemporary culture and previous manifestations. The relation is reciprocal. On the one hand, we must look at how the past has influenced the current state of affairs. We should also ask how the present uses its heritage—the image the culture of today has of its past and how this image functions. Some might prefer to label this relationship between past and present configurations of a people's culture intra-cultural, stressing the continuities within an evolving system. We should emphasize that at any given time a culture is a coherent unit that deserves the holistic analysis we use when dealing with contemporary culture. We must look at the past not so much with the historian's concern for events as with the anthropologist's eye for stable patterns of behavior. Neither the past nor the present should be studied in complete isolation. As distinct, but related cultural moments, they can often illuminate each other. This comparative dimension need not be invoked at every turn, any more than cross-cultural contrasts between the U.S. and the target culture would be when studying contemporary culture. A frantic effort to make the achievements of history seem relevant is as counterproductive as pretending that the present has no bearing on our view of the past.

While the most important cross-cultural link we can make is between

the current and historical cultural systems, we should not ignore the more obvious one: comparisons between the North American experience and the target culture. Using our own contemporary view as a point of departure, we might examine the image we have of the second culture's heritage (e.g., our perceptions of the French Revolution). In the same manner, we should take into account the target culture's perception of our past (French views today of the American Revolution). In addition, a third field is also open, cross-cultural contacts in the past (such as, French Huguenot influence in colonial America).

Authenticity

Presenting an accurate picture of the second culture has proven to be a constant challenge, but one we have dealt with successfully. All of us have probably had the chagrin of discovering that the statistics on which a generalization was based were out of date, or that some document or artifact that illustrated so neatly one of our points had entered the realm of folklore. Instead of authentically contemporary culture, we were presenting society as it was ten or fifteen years ago. We may not have overcome all the problems of maintaining an up-to-date view of a second culture at a distance, but we are at least sensitized to the issue. Surveys of civilization teachers show that access to authentic current information is one of their chief desires.[5] We are alert to the need to continually update our data base, test the quality of our generalizations, and eliminate inaccuracies and stereotypes.

We should not settle for popularized, romanticized versions of the past, any more than we would take the impressionistic journalism of news magazines as the last word when researching contemporary culture. When dealing with history we are not immune to the problems of maintaining the information quality. We might be tempted to believe that the essence of a culture's heritage can be captured for all times in a textbook. While the events of the past may be fixed in time, our perception of them is not. The available past depends on historians to make documents accessible. But contemporary trends and attitudes motivate our interest in this or that aspect of the past, and inspire reinterpretations of historical antecedents. The same intellectual honesty that drives us to seek out the latest information about contemporary culture should lead us to demand the most

accurate information about the past. Our generalizations about history, no matter now objective they seem, are inevitably interpretations based on a selection of facts. We should be willing to test our comfortable certainties in the light of new interpretations proposed by historians, just as we reassess our generalizations about current culture.

The Necessity of a Comprehensive Model

The most valuable contribution of the anthropological approach is the comprehensive model of culture it provides. In the initial stages of instruction presenting the full range of experience in the second culture may be impossible, but our selection should be made in light of an awareness of all of the culture's components. Students who complete our sequence of courses should overcome an early fragmentary view by being exposed to a broader configuration of the culture. This can only be done with the help of some model of the cultural unit such as E. T. Hall's "Map of Culture" in *The Silent Language*, with its one hundred elements, or Howard Nostrand's "Emergent Model," both of which have been influential with language/culture specialists.[6] Nostrand's has the advantage of being quite detailed, while at the same time organized around subsystems which correspond to the ones used by anthropologists. His heading "The Culture," including the value system, behavior traits and world-picture and their expression in art and language, might be called the ideological component. "The Society" includes the sociopolitical institutions of family, class, government, sex, and age roles. "The Ecology" corresponds to the most basic component of culture, the techno-economic adaptation to the environment which allows members of a culture to provide for their material needs.

Just as we would not concentrate exclusively on any one subsystem of contemporary culture to the exclusion of others, we should aim at giving a comprehensive view of the past. The key here is not so much to give an exhaustive account of each subsystem as to show how they interact. No phenomenon is an isolated element, but is best understood as having ramifications at every level of the cultural system. Thus, it is just as much a mistake to isolate the formal qualities of a work of art without considering the political climate in which it was conceived, the social values it embodies, or who bought or produced it, as to never include art in our

classes. We may not have a panoramic view of all the subsystems of a past culture, but we should at least highlight some features that have significant implications at every level in order to illustrate the dynamic unity of culture.

A second feature of this anthropological concept of culture, in addition to its integrative nature, works to keep the range of data within manageable proportions and yet comprehensive. Most models point to an area of deeply held values that are a fundamental component of the culture—at once the most pervasive and the most resistant to change. Nostrand, for example, calls them the "ground of meaning, the basis of what makes sense to bearers of the culture."[7] Another model, based on anthropologist Julian Steward's distinction between core and peripheral aspects of a culture, has the advantage of not locating the core exclusively in the ideological level as Nostrand seems to do. According to this model, the core can be envisaged as a pyramid superimposed on the three chief levels or subsystems of culture. The pyramid's base is in the techno-economic level and its summit is the ideological level, with the sociopolitical level occupying the intervening space. The core institutions include elements from all three subsystems, but "the techno-economic factors figure most prominently in defining and forming the strategic features of any society."[8] Our task then is to identify these central elements in the culture's heritage and show their interaction at all levels, from the economic base to their expression as ideology. In practical terms, this means we should give special attention to the value system of the most influential social groups of the era we are dealing with and situate these values in their economic and political contexts.

A final consideration is the contrast between the experience of individuals as they function as members of a culture and a conceptual overview of the culture. In our beginning classes we rightly stress what it is like to live in the target culture and attempt to give students some idea of how to manage should they ever visit the foreign country. Only later do we add more descriptive appraisals of the second culture. It is more difficult to reconstruct the experience of past generations, but the imaginative re-creation of the lives of representative individuals—their daily activities, preoccupations, relationships with others, the setting in which they lived— is one of the most powerful tools for demonstrating the integrative nature of culture. Documents, artifacts, literary works, memoirs, or works

of art can be used to summon up the personal experience of the past for students.

To sum up, our presentation of the culture's heritage should take into account the following factors, dosed in terms of our students' level, our course goals, and the available time:

1. We should search out the most accurate information and be aware of the range of interpretations among historians.
2. Using a model that provides a structured inventory of the culture, we should take into account its subsystems.
3. We should feature topics which illustrate the interaction of all subsystems.
4. Stress should be given to the core elements that are most pervasive and resistant to change.
5. The individual's experience of the culture should not be overlooked in our effort to cover its major institutions and achievements.
6. The heritage should be related to the present culture both in terms of its influence on contemporary patterns and the image the current culture holds of the past.
7. Any links (influence or image) with the students' own culture should be explored along with their affective reaction to the foreign elements under consideration.

Activities

Many of the strategies that have been developed to teach contemporary culture can be adapted when dealing with the culture's history. In some cases, we are adapting relatively new activities like culture capsules and assimilators. In other cases, techniques such as role playing and simulations that are used in many disciplines are involved. In still other cases, strategies which have been developed to use documents from popular culture like advertisements and cartoons are applied to artifacts from the past. The pedagogy of contemporary culture favors active involvement over methods that rely on lecture and reading; they have an affective as well as cognitive component, and seek to integrate language learning with cultural instruction. I have found that activities along the following lines can be used with success to involve students with the culture's heritage.

Role playing. Students are assigned identities in the past and asked to imagine their lives: family status, income, work, role in society. By distributing roles along the whole social hierarchy, a microcosm of society at any moment can be reconstituted. If possible, help students visualize their roles by showing art works which portray each role. After they have described the life of their character, they might be asked to tell how their character would react to a crisis or an ordinary event like a marriage.

Simulations and reenactments. These can be short enough to take only a few minutes of class time or elaborate productions that involve extensive research and a number of classes to plan and perform. Historical events can be reenacted or hypothetical ones can be staged. (What if the Estates General had met in 1765 instead of 1789?) Deliberative occasions like trials, political assemblies or artist-patron discussions work well. Careful planning is a must, with the instructor assigning fairly detailed roles and providing a scenario to guide the action. It is especially important to reserve time for a "debriefing" at the conclusion of the exercise to give students the opportunity to analyze and critique their performance.

Dialogues of the dead. The confrontation of two figures who could have never met allows for a less predictable outcome than a reenactment. For example, Louis XIV's ghost returns to Versailles to reproach his successor for not living up to the standard set by the Sun King. The link between present-day culture and the past can be shown if one of the figures comes from today's society.

Assimilators. Students are presented with a situation they might encounter in the target culture along with a series of possible explanations for the foreign behavior pattern or actions they might take to resolve the situation. This activity works equally well when set in the present or past. Some problem that might have confronted members of the past culture is presented; it may be an imaginary but representative situation, or even a real one. Students are asked to evaluate a number of possible solutions to the problem in light of the range of options. If an option more suitable to today's world than to the past is included, students can be encouraged to see how values and attitudes have changed over the years. Too often they unthinkingly try to impose twentieth-century solutions which are completely out of place in the past context. These exercises provide a structured method for focusing on an individual's response to societal problems and make a good introduction to more unstructured role playing.

Films. More films set in the past are attempting to create a documentary-like re-creation of life in some historical era. Ones like the recent *Le Retour de Martin Guerre* or Rossillini's *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* are examples of this quest for authenticity. The same kind of analysis for studying the cultural content of movies set in contemporary times can be applied to films which evoke earlier periods.[8] Various social institutions like class, sex roles, the family, government, or the economy can be investigated by inventorying them as they are embodied in the characters. The most systematic method is to have students working in groups fill in a grid: along the top are listed all the film's characters, and along the left margin all the social roles to be examined. Once each character has been analyzed in terms of a given role, generalizations about how the role appears in the film are possible. These generalizations can be compared to those of social historians. The value system can be studied through the movie's plot. The characters' actions—the choices they make, the conflicts that bring them in opposition to each other—are motivated by their values. We must remind students that no matter how "authentic" the film claims to be, such re-creations of the past are invariably shaped by the current culture that produces them. Witness the allusions to recent Polish history that have been read into the Franco-Polish production of *Danton*. Sixty years from now will such films seem as dated as Abel Gance's epic about the French Revolution *(Napoléon)* does today? Historical movies are as much a product of the need to interpret the past as of the documentary impulse. Why does a particular historical epoch attract attention? If the film departs from the historical record, does this accommodate some contemporary attitude?

Works of art. Films by nature project a current view of the past. Works of art produced during the period under study are more reliable as cultural documents. The strategies developed to explore the visual component of advertisements can be useful here. We cannot afford to dismiss the scholarship of art historians, particularly social historians of art. But we must break down the attitude held by many of our students that art works are mysterious icons to be considered only at a reverential distance. The familiar strategies—direct students to carefully describe the content of an ad's illustration, formulate hypotheses about its meaning, and test the hypotheses while seeking any additional information needed to confirm or disprove them—can be used in the initial stages of dealing with art objects. Much art in the past had a persuasive function similar to the visual

element in modern advertising. It served as political indoctrination, as affirmation of some religious belief, or as celebration of a particular social class. Just as we show how advertisements are targeted to specific modern audiences, we can study how works of art appealed to the values of their publics in the past.[10]

The following activities can be used to show how images of the past function in current culture:

Advertisements. Ad writers are particularly sensitive to prevailing attitudes and stereotypes. Their success in promoting various products is based on their ability to quote back to the public its own beliefs and desires. Students can be directed to ads that appeal to the current culture's view of its heritage. Sidney Hahn, for example, has compared the theme of tradition in American and German advertising.[11] Students might consider what historical figures or periods are used most prominently, the kinds of products that are associated with the past, and the accuracy of the view of history presented. American ads that refer to the target culture's heritage can also be introduced.

Folksongs. Songs which take historical figures as their heroes or heroines are another source of contemporary allusions to the past. Even though the song itself was probably written long ago, if it remains popular today it continues to shape current perceptions of the past. Did the historical Dagobert merit the bumbling image he has in the children's song "Le Bon Roi Dagobert"? Why should little school children who know nothing of the Merovingian "do-nothing" kings enjoy a song about a seventh-century Frankish monarch? One might similarly study "Anne de Bretagne" or "Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre."

History textbooks. History texts present not so much popular stereotypes about the past as the official view society seeks to impart to its young members. Primary school texts are often the most revealing because they tend to concentrate on what is considered the most essential, and because they are often more concerned with communicating values than information. Students can be asked to compare a figure or event in the textbook with one in some more impartial source. Does the official view tend to gloss over conflicts or idealize certain figures? What characteristics typify the model ruler? How are other cultures presented? The foreign history textbook can be an ideal teaching tool in global education programs. Students can compare how events in American history are presented in foreign texts

to the treatment of their own social science books. Conversely, they can examine the view their own books give of the target culture's past. Finally, by examining the format of the foreign textbooks students can often gain insight into learning styles and teaching methods in the second culture. Is an inductive method based on the analysis of documentary evidence used? Is the history presented as a story, an engaging narrative? Is the text divided into sections and subsections in outline fashion? Are there summaries that seem meant to be memorized?

A series of activities which I have used in teaching the Gallo-Roman period of French history will further illustrate such an approach.

1. (Simulation) Students write a speech Vercingetorix might have given to unite the Gallic tribes in resisting Julius Caesar's invading armies.
2. (Image in contemporary culture) Students examine the image of the Romans in the Astérix comics where the emphasis is often on the contrast between the *irréductibles Gaulois* and the occupying Roman army rather than on the hundreds of years of fruitful synthesis between the two peoples.
3. (Art works) Urban life is explored using slides of the many public buildings constructed during the Roman period—temples, theaters, arena, public baths. Emphasis is on the economic, administrative, and cultural role of the cities, and how these buildings functioned in people's lives. While the most impressive remains are found in the south which the Romans first colonized, even a relatively unimportant town like Lutèce (Paris) had large public buildings which can still be seen (the Cluny baths and the *arènes de Lutèce*).
4. (Work of art) Prepare a study guide to the *Maison carrée* in Nîmes, which was built as a temple dedicated to the Emperor Augustus. Focus on how the Romans adapted the Greek style of temple architecture and the importance of the cult of the emperor in religious and political life.
5. (Role playing) Students write a debate set in the years after Julius Caesar's conquest of all Gaul. A Gaul from Nîmes who is proud to have assimilated Roman culture argues with one from the north where Roman ways have not yet penetrated as deeply and who has little enthusiasm for the conquerors' civilization.

6. (Influence on the U.S.) Compare the Capitol in Richmond, Virginia, to the *Maison carrée*. Thomas Jefferson was much impressed by the Gallo-Roman temple and used it as a model for his design of the Virginia statehouse, one of the first examples of Greek revival architecture which can be seen today throughout America.

I would like to conclude with a reminder that my parallel between teaching contemporary civilization and its heritage is to some extent provocative rather than conclusive. If pushed too far it becomes counterproductive. The subtle balance between the current and past culture is difficult to maintain, but neither should be sacrificed to the other. Viewing other cultures only in terms of our own, which we hope to overcome when studying contemporary cultures, takes on two forms when we deal with the past. The first is anachronism which causes us to project onto the past our present values. In spite of the adage *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*, history is not merely reenacted by the same characters disguised in colorful period costumes. The similarities between contemporary situations and past events should be pointed out, but ultimately we must respect the unique specificity of each era. The second danger is considering history too exclusively in terms of its impact on current life. We trivialize the achievements of past generations if they are reduced to their imprint on the contemporary collective consciousness. Great civilizations produced artifacts, systems of thought and belief, events, and personages that are passionately interesting and valuable in themselves, apart from any relation to the present. This said, the challenge remains to define more carefully the balance among the seven components identified as belonging in our civilization courses (including an attention both to contemporary culture and its antecedents), and to sharpen a pedagogical approach that incorporates the result of this reflection.

Notes

1. For bibliographies of teaching culture see the review articles in the ACTFL Foreign Language Education Series Howard L. Nostrand, "Empathy for a Second Culture Motivation and Techniques," in Gilbert A Jarvis, ed., *Responding to New Realities* (Lincolnwood, IL National Textbook Company, 1974), pp 263-328, and Linda M Crawford-Lange and Dale L. Lange, "Doing the Unthinkable in the Second-Language Classroom. A Process for the Integration of Language and Culture," in Theodore V. Higgs, ed., *Teaching for Proficiency, The Organizing Principle* (Lincolnwood, IL National Textbook Company, 1984), pp 179-200
2. It is difficult to distinguish between culture and civilization For my purposes here, *culture* is the

most basic term. A civilization is merely the culture of an advanced (as opposed to a technologically primitive) society. In dealing with past civilizations the anthropologist A. L. Kroeber's definition is instructive: "Civilization might be roughly defined as the residue of history when one abstracts the events in history." A. L. Kroeber, *An Anthropologist Looks at History* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1963), p.5.

3 See the report of Frank Paul Bowman on his course on France between 1789 and 1944 at the University of Pennsylvania, "Teaching French History in French," *The French Review* 56(1983), pp 379-384

4. Margaret Mead, "How Anthropology Can Become a Component in a Liberal Arts Education," in Howard Altman, ed., *Essays on the Teaching of Culture* (Detroit: The Advancement Press, 1974), p 5.

5 Edward Knox, "Report on the Teaching of Civilization," *The French Review* 56(1983), p.372.

6 E T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (New York: Anchor Press, 1973), pp 196-197; and Howard Nostrand, "The 'Emergent Model' (Structured Inventory of a Socio-cultural System) Applied to Contemporary France," *American Foreign Language Teacher* (1974), pp 23-27, 40

7 Nostrand, p.24

8. David Kaplan and Robert A. Manners, *Culture Theory* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p.47.

9. See Tom Carr, "Exploring the Cultural Content of French Feature Films," *The French Review*, 53 (1980), pp 359-368

10. For a more detailed description of such activities, see Tom Carr, "The Visual Arts in the Civilization Classroom," *Foreign Language Annals*, 16 (1983), pp 45-51.

11 Sidney Hahn, "Strategies for Increasing Cross-Cultural Awareness," in Renate Schultz, ed *Teaching for Communication* (Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company, 1976), pp 65-69.